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ABSTRACT

This document presents the results of a national survey completed by 223 junior colleges about their existing commencement practices. In addition to comments and suggestions about commencement programs, tables are presented for each area: (1) mandatory participation in commencement exercises summarized by regional accreditation association; (2) percentage of eligible students participating in commencement exercises in 1971-72; (3) percentage of graduates participating in commencement exercises in 1972 by institutional size; (4) median percentage of eligible student participation reported by each regional accrediting association for 1962, 1967, and 1972; (5) groups identified as having the greatest degree of participation in commencement exercises; (6) reasons cited for favoring or opposing the continuation of commencement programs; and (7) classification of changes in graduation format and subsequent changes in participation. Concerning continuation of commencement programs, 269 reasons were given in favor of their continuation, and 14 reasons were given opposing it. Over half of the proposed changes in format dealt with the commencement speaker, either eliminating all speeches or replacing an outside speaker with a student, faculty member, or alumnus. (RN)

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COLLEGE OF THE SEQUOIAS
Visalia, California

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES
COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT EXERCISE SURVEY
Summer, 1972

Number of survey forms mailed: 244

Survey forms returned as of September 15, 1972: 223 (91.4%)

1. How many of the respondents' colleges held commencement exercises in 1971-72?

   Yes - 220

   No. - 3 *

   * A graduate luncheon, banquet, or tea was substituted for the traditional graduation program in all three instances.

2. Responses to the question "Was student participation in commencement exercises required?" grouped by regional accrediting association.

Table 1
Mandatory Participation in Commencement Exercises Summarized by Regional Accreditation Association

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	Accrediting Association													
	Western		North Western		North Central		New England		Middle States		Southern		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	1	1.8	3	10.3	18	47.4	14	58.3	14	33.3	19	54.3	69	30.9
No	54	98.2	26	89.7	20	52.6	10	41.7	28	66.7	16	45.7	154	69.1

3. Responses to the request for the "most accurate indication possible" of the percentage of eligible graduates who participated in commencement exercises in 1962, 1967, and 1972: Tables 2, 3, and 4 (217 of the 223 respondents provided figures for this item.)

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Table 2

Percentage of Eligible Students Participating in Commencement Exercises in 1971-72*

Percent Participating	Western	North Western	North Central	New England	Middle States	Southern	Total
10-19	10	2	0	0	1	0	13
20-29	15	3	1	0	3	3	25
30-39	12	3	5	1	4	0	25
40-49	8	7	4	2	4	1	26
50-59	4	5	6	1	4	3	23
60-69	2	3	6	6	4	2	23
70-79	0	2	4	4	5	6	21
80-89	2	0	3	1	8	8	22
90-99	1	3	10	9	7	9	39
Median Percent of Participation	31 ~~32.2~~	48.1	65.3	74.5	69.5	80.1	58.2

* Table 2 presents a frequency distribution of the responses to the request for estimates of the proportions of eligible graduates who took part in graduation exercises grouped by accreditation region. Only 1 college in the Western region, for example, reported that 90 - 99 percent of their graduates participated whereas 10 reported participation in the 10 - 19 percent range. The median percents of participation for all community colleges reporting from each region are presented on the bottom line. The frequency of responses for each percentage range and the median percentage of participation from the entire group of respondents are presented in the right-hand column.

Table 3

Percentage of Graduates Participating in Commencement Exercises, 1972
By Institutional Size *

Total Day and Evening Enrollment						
Percent of Participation	Under 2,000	2,000-3,999	4,000-6,999	7,000-9,999	10,000 and Above	Total
10-19	1	0	3	4	5	13
20-29	0	3	4	4	14	25
30-39	2	2	7	4	10	25
40-49	0	7	9	4	6	26
50-59	3	6	5	2	7	23
60-69	6	10	5	1	1	23
70-79	8	7	5	1	0	21
80-89	5	3	10	3	1	22
90-99	17	7	10	3	2	39
Median Percent	81.5	63.9	61.5	42.0	32.8	58.2

* Enrollment data were obtained from the JUNIOR COLLEGE DIRECTORY, 1972 American Association of Junior Colleges.

Table 3 reports the estimates of student participation in 1972 graduation exercises by institutional size instead of region. The suggested correlation between percentage of graduates participating in commencement exercises and college size (student enrollment in day and evening program in fall 1971 as reported in the Junior College Directory, 1972) should be accepted with caution. A much greater proportion of the reporting colleges from the Middle States, New England, and Southern regions, where mandatory participation is relatively common, had enrollments in the under 2,000 and 2,000 - 3,999 categories than did those from the Western and Northwestern regions in which participation in graduation is usually optional.

In Table 4, the median estimated percentage of participation by eligible graduates is reported by accrediting region for 1962, 1967, and 1972. Also shown in parentheses for each year are the number of responding colleges which reported that commencement exercises were held in that year.

Table 4

Median Percentage of Eligible Student Participation by Regional Accrediting Association: 1962, 1967, and 1972

Year	Median Percentage Participation By Eligible Graduates						
	Western	North Western	North Central	New England	Middle States	Southern	Total
1962	69.5 (N=38)	89.5 (N=10)	92.4 (N=17)	94.5 (N=17)	92.5 (N=14)	91.2 (N=15)	90.0 (N=99)
1967	50.1 (N=47)	71.2 (N=18)	86.2 (N=26)	91.4 (N=13)	89.5 (N=20)	84.5 (N=27)	74.7 (N=151)
1972	31.2 (N=54)	48.1 (N=28)	65.3 (N=38)	74.5 (N=24)	69.5 (N=40)	80.1 (N=40)	58.2 (N=217)

Table 4 points up vividly the growth of the community college movement in the decade of the 1960's. Of the 217 colleges for which 1972 graduation data were supplied, only 99, or less than half, were in existence (or had been in operation long enough to have a graduating class) in 1962. Even as recently as 1967, only 151, or slightly more than two-thirds, --69.1 percent--of the 217 colleges had a graduating class. Regional differences in the growth of campuses are suggested also, with the Western region, comprised mainly of California colleges, and New England region having the smallest proportionate increases in colleges with graduating classes.

4. Responses to the question about student groups from which the greatest participation in commencement exercises had been noted are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Groups Identified As Having Greatest Degree of Participation In Commencement Exercises

Student Groups	Western	North Western	North Central	New England	Middle States	Southern	Total
Adults	30	15	10	3	7	17	82
Voc.-Tech	16	21	11	8	11	4	81
Ethnic and Racial Minorities	17	2	3	1	6	2	31
Minors	3	1	1	1	4	0	10
Transfer	5	1	3	0	2	1	12
No Differences noted	14	4	7	13	13	8	59
Totals	85	44	35	26	43	42	275 *

*Total exceeds number of respondents because more than one group could be cited.

5. "Is faculty participation in the commencement program required? "

Yes - 158

No - 65

6. "Do faculty members wear academic regalia? " *

Yes - 183 *

No - 21

* Responses do not equal the total number of colleges because some persons who answered "No" to item 5 did not answer this question.

7. "Do you believe your college should hold a commencement program? "

Yes - 194

No - 14

Undecided - 4

8. The reasons given by respondents for favoring or opposing commencement programs on their campuses tended to fall into somewhat easily classified groups and are tabulated in Table 6. Several representative quotations for the different classes of comments are presented below Table 6.

Table 6

Reasons Cited For Favoring or Opposing the Continuation of Commencement Programs

Favoring Commencement Programs:	Number of Times Cited	Percent of Total
Because of importance to family and relatives	56	20.8
Retain for those graduates who still desire it	55	20.7
Has intrinsic value as a tradition of higher education	44	16.0
Provides a means for giving deserved recognition to graduate	43	15.9
Possesses important community and public relations value	27	10.0
In response to students' demands for graduation program	25	9.3
Because it is the only college graduation most students will have	19	7.3
TOTAL	269 *	100.0
Opposing Commencement Programs or Undecided:		
Irrelevant to the contemporary college scene	8	57.1
Lack of student interest	6	42.9
TOTAL	14 *	100.0

* Totals exceed number of colleges because more than one reason was cited by some respondents.

SELECTED COMMENTS

" We serve a student body 85 percent Spanish-American. Commencement is very important to parents. It gives them a chance to be proud. We have had some student opposition but parents soon veto such moves. Anything but the most traditional commencement is unacceptable to our parents at Trinidad. " Trinidad State Junior College, Colorado.

"Rites of passage are celebrated in most societies."- Lower Columbia College, Washington.

"It is so important to students who attend that they brook no change that will lessen the opportunity for them to parade in front of and be seen by their parents and friends."- Los Angeles Valley College, California.

"It seems to be what it's all about to 60% of our students -- we feel we should provide for those to whom it is important."- Long Beach City College, California.

"As long as there are sufficient numbers of students who wish the traditional ceremony, we will provide it."- Clark College, Washington.

"Commencement.... represents a connection of the present graduate to the long line of graduates of colleges and universities, a line reaching back to the medieval universities." - Tunxis Community College, Connecticut.

"The commencement exercise is still part of tradition and an expected event on the part of the citizens in the State of Maine." - University of Maine, Bangor, Maine. (Penobscot Valley Community College)

"It provides deserved and needed recognition for students and their families and focuses positive attention on the college." - Schoolcraft College, Michigan.

"As coordinator of Public Relations, I recognize the value to the image of the college of this opportunity to tell our success story to our community. The 1972 commencement was attended by 2,700 parents, friends, and well-wishers of graduates, most of whom have little other opportunity to visit our campus." - Catonsville Community College, Maryland.

"This is a great event for our older students, many of whom had long since given up hope for a college degree. Often large families attend to see mother or father graduate. We don't worry about youngsters for whom it is not 'in' to be enthusiastic. Most of them expect four-year degrees elsewhere." - College of Dupage, Illinois.

"I feel the ceremony means very little. It's more of a show for the institution than for the students. I personally would just mail out the diplomas." - Phillips College, Arkansas.

"Two-thirds of the students who could attend commencement do not do so. It involves too much time, money, and effort." - Illinois Central College, Illinois.

"It's a hassle and meets the needs of too few." - El Centro College, Dallas.

"Traditional, meaningful experience. In my opinion, the commencement should be offered for those who want to participate. Hopefully, the pendulum will swing back and more students will want to participate." - West Valley College, California.

9. "Have you changed the basic format of the commencement program in recent years?"

   Yes - 82

   No - 141

   Respondents who answered "yes" were asked to describe briefly the changes made and indicate to what extent participation by graduates in commencement exercises had changed following implementation of the modifications. ("Practically no increase" - 0 to 5 percent; "Small increase" - 6 to 10 percent; "Moderate increase" - 21 to 40 percent; and "Large increase" - 41 percent and above.)

   An effort was made to quantify the descriptions by grouping them in accordance with the nature of the changes, as reported in Table 7.

Table 7
Classification of Changes in Graduation Format and Subsequent Change in Participation

General Nature of Change	Total	Increase in Percent of Students Participating			
		0-5%	6-20%	21-40%	Above 40%
SPEAKER:					
Outside speaker replaced by student, faculty or alumnus	28	18	4	4	2
Eliminated all speeches	9	7	0	2	0
Dropped student speaker	1	0	0	0	1
TRADITIONAL PROGRAM:					
Substituted luncheon, dinner, or informal dinner for ceremony	5	3	1	1	0
Shortened ceremony (Fewer speakers, etc.)	5	3	2	0	0
Non-traditional elements (slides, modern music, ballads) added to traditional ceremony	4	2	0	1	1
Discontinued wearing of caps and gowns	4	2	1	0	1
Post-ceremony reception for graduates, families, and staff	4	1	2	0	1
Added processional and recessional	3	2	0	1	0
Dispensed with processional and recessional	4	3	0	1	0
Substituted ballad or reading for invocation	2	2	0	0	0
MECHANICS OF GRADUATION PROGRAM:					
Graduation by division instead of all college	4	3	0	0	1
Hold graduation on last day of class meetings	2	1	1	0	0
Diplomas distributed prior to processional	1	0	0	0	1
Students must approve of basic format	1	0	0	1	0
Ceremony moved indoors	1	0	1	0	0
High school diplomas and certificates also awarded	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	79	47	12	11	9

Those who wished to do so were invited to make suggestions about graduation and commencement exercises. These comments have been classified and summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

Suggestions About Commencement Programs

SUGGESTIONS	FREQUENCY OF SUGGESTIONS
Increase student and faculty involvement in planning and execution	42
Keep ceremony brief and simple	37
Retain dignified and traditional ceremony	7
Eliminate wearing of academic regalia	5
Make participation optional	5
Make participation mandatory	4
Discontinue unless students find it more relevant	4
Have only good (or nationally known) speaker	4
Have departmental ceremonies	4
Eliminate all speeches	3
All others (cited less than 3 times)	7
TOTAL	122